



THE
CONNOISSEUR.

By Mr. T O W N,

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— — — — *Tum in lecto quoque videres
Stridere secretâ divisos aure susurros.
Nullos bis mallet ludos spectasse. Sed illa
Redde age, quæ deinceps risisti.* — HOR.

To Mr. T O W N.

SIR,



S the ladies are naturally become the immediate objects of your care, will you permit a complaint to be inserted in your paper, which is founded upon a matter of fact?

They will pardon me, if by laying before you a particular instance I was lately witness to of their improper behaviour, I endeavour to expose a reigning evil which subjects them to many shameful imputations.

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I RECEIVED

I RECEIVED last week a dinner-card from a friend, with an intimation that I should meet some very agreeable ladies. At my arrival I found that the company consisted chiefly of females, who indeed did me the honour to rise, but quite disconcerted me in paying my respects by their whispering each other and appearing to stifle a laugh. When I was seated, the ladies grouped themselves up in a corner, and entered into a private cabal, seemingly to discourse upon points of great secrecy and importance, but of equal merriment and diversion.

THE same conduct of keeping close to their ranks was observed at table, where the ladies seated themselves together. Their conversation was here also confined wholly to themselves, and seemed like the mysteries of the *Bona Dea*, in which men were forbidden to have any share. It was a continued laugh and a whisper from the beginning to the end of dinner. A whole sentence was scarce ever spoken aloud. Single words indeed now and then broke forth; such as *odious*, *horrible*, *detestable*, *shocking*, HUMBUG. This last new-coined expression, which is only to be found in the nonsensical vocabulary, sounds absurd and disagreeable whenever it is pronounced; but from the mouth of a lady it is “shocking, detestable, horrible, and odious.”

My friend seemed to be but in an uneasy situation at his own table: but I was far more miserable. I was mute, and seldom dared to lift up my eyes from my plate, or turn my head to call for small beer, lest by some awkward posture I might draw upon me a whisper or a laugh. *Sancho*, when he was forbid to eat of a delicious banquet set before him, could scarce appear more melancholy. The rueful length of my face might possibly encrease the mirth of my tormentors: at least their joy seemed to rise in exact proportion with my

my misery. At length, however, the time of my delivery approached. Dinner ended, the ladies made their exits in pairs, and went off hand in hand, whispering like the two Kings of Brentford.

MODEST men, Mr. Town, are deeply wounded, when they imagine themselves the objects of ridicule or contempt and the pain is the greater, when it is given by those whom they admire, and from whom they are ambitious of receiving any marks of countenance and favour. Yet we must allow that affronts are pardonable from ladies, as they are often prognostics of future kindness. If a lady strikes our cheek, we can very willingly follow the precept of the Gospel, and turn the other cheek to be smitten. Even a blow from a fair hand conveys pleasure; but this battery of whispers is against all legal rights of war; — poisoned arrows, and stabs in the dark, are not more repugnant to the general laws of humanity.

MODERN writers of comedy often introduce a pert witling into their pieces, who is very severe upon the rest of the company; but all his waggery is spoken *afide*. These gigglers and whisperers seem to be acting the same part in company, that this arch rogue does in the play. Every word or motion produces a train of whispers; the dropping of a snuff-box, or spilling the tea, is sure to be accompanied with a titter; and upon the entrance of any one with something particular in his person or manner, I have seen a whole room in a buzz like a bee-hive.

THIS practice of whispering, if it is any where allowable, may perhaps be indulged the fair sex at church, where the conversation can only be carried on by the secret symbols of a curtsy, an ogle, or a nod. A whisper in this place is very
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often of great use, as it serves to convey the most secret intelligence, which a lady would be ready to burst with, if she could not find vent for it by this kind of auricular confession. A piece of scandal transpires in this manner from one pew to another, then presently whizzes along the chancel, from whence it crawls up to the galleries, till at last the whole church hums with it.

It were also to be wished, that the ladies would be pleased to confine themselves to whispering in their *tête à tête* conferences at an opera or the play-house; which would be a proper deference to the rest of the audience. In *France*, we are told, it is common for the *Parterre* to join with the performers in any favourite air; but we seem to have carried this custom still further, as our boxes, without concerning themselves in the least with the play, are even louder than the players. The wit and humour of a *Vanbrugh* is frequently interrupted by a brilliant dialogue between two persons of fashion; and a love-scene in the side-box has often been more attended to than that on the stage. As to their loud bursts of laughter at the theatre, they may very well be excused, when they are excited by any lively strokes in a comedy: but I have seen our ladies titter at the most distressful scenes in *Romeo* and *Juliet*, grin over the anguish of a *Monimia* or *Belvidera*, and fairly laugh King *Lear* off the stage.

Thus the whole behaviour of these ladies is in direct contradiction to good manners. They laugh when they should cry, are loud when they should be silent, and are silent when their conversation is desirable. If a man in a select company was thus to laugh or whisper me out of countenance, I should be apt to construe it as an affront, and demand an explanation. As to the ladies, I would desire them to reflect how much
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they would suffer, if their own weapons were turned against them, and the gentlemen should attack them with the same arts of laughing and whispering. But, however free they may be from our resentment, they are still open to ill-natured suspicions. They do not consider, what strange constructions may be put on these laughs and whispers. It were, indeed, of little consequence, if we only imagined that they were taking the reputations of their acquaintance to pieces, or abusing the company round; but when they indulge themselves in this behaviour, some perhaps may be led to conclude, that they are discoursing upon topics, which they are afraid or ashamed to speak of in a less private manner.

If the misconduct which I have described had been only to be found, Mr. TOWN, at my friend's table, I should not have troubled you with this letter: but the same kind of ill-breeding prevails too often and in too many places. The gigglers and the whisperers are innumerable; they beset us wherever we go; and it is observable, that after a short murmur of whispers out comes the burst of laughter:—like a gun-powder serpent, which, after hissing about for some time, goes off in a bounce.

SOME excuse may perhaps be framed for this ill-timed merriment in the fair sex. *Venus*, the goddess of beauty, is frequently called the *laughter-loving dame*; and by laughing our modern ladies may possibly imagine, that they render themselves like *Venus*. I have indeed remarked, that the ladies commonly adjust their laugh to their persons, and are merry in proportion as it sets off their particular charms. One lady is never further moved than to a smile or a simper, because nothing else shows her dimples to so much advantage; another, who has a very fine set of teeth, runs into the broad grin; while a third, who is admired for a well-turned

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neck

neck and graceful chest, calls up all her beauties to view by breaking out in violent and repeated peals of laughter.

I WOULD not be understood to impose gravity or too great a reserve on the fair sex. Let them laugh at a feather, but let them declare openly that it is a feather which occasions their mirth. I must confess, that laughter becomes the young, the gay, and the handsome: but a whisper is unbecoming at all ages and in both sexes; nor ought it ever to be practised, except in the round gallery at *St. Paul's*, or in the famous whispering place in *Gloucester* cathedral, where two whisperers hear each other at the distance of five and twenty yards.

I am,

Sir,

Your most humble Servant,

K. L.